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THE LOST PARTS OF LATIN LITERATURE¹

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There is a river in Virginia, well named the Cheat. Flowing in full volume through its upland valleys, most of its waters presently disappear in caves and subterranean ways. From time to time part of the water returns to the open channel lower down, sometimes to be lost again, then partially recovered, perhaps to be lost finally, until the river reaches its end less in volume than its beginnings promised.

Very much like this has been the fate of individual Latin writers and the course of Latin literature in general. Look for an instant at the historians. Tacitus, considered as a whole, once disappeared, and of what once disappeared only a part has reappeared. So, too, the books of Sallust, Livy, and the elder Pliny, in varying proportion, have drifted to like fate. The greater part of the best books of Roman history, along with the greater part of the inferior books, has been lost. And what is thus true of histories is true in an important, though differing degree of the other kinds of writing—as poetry, oratory, epistles, and the books of erudition.

The full stream reached its accumulated height soon after the end of the Empire. As late as the fifth century it was possible to observe it comparatively entire. Then came the startling diminution of its observable volume in the three succeeding centuries, the small but considerable swelling of the stream in Carolingian times, the added increase in the Scholastic age, the great returning of the waters at the Renaissance, and the stray tricklings which have been coming in ever since. But it is not yet the full stream, nor may we expect it ever will be.

Never since the fifth century, or at latest the sixth, has it been possible for anyone critically or uncritically to observe Latin literature in its entirety, or to observe it as his own, whether as a con-

¹ Address before the Classical Conference at Ann Arbor, Mich., March 30, 1905.

temporaneous reality or a fairly complete memory. We, indeed, look at it with all the self-correcting aids to vision that come with longer perspective, but what we are observing is only a small part, and even that small part we observe as strangers. Men of letters at the end of the Empire had most of it, at least in possible possession. The much-derided Roman grammarians—crudely uncritical, of course, because they could not be lifted out of the world they lived in, any more than we can escape the helps and hindrances of our surroundings—had at least this advantage: they lived in the presence of a literature that was fairly entire, whether they were able to appreciate it or not. Cicero's judgments on the Roman orators embraced practically the whole series up to his time, and the record to which he had access surpassed any we may hope to examine. Quintilian saw both Greek and Latin literatures as a well-ordered whole, and formed his opinions accordingly. And as we read the *Brutus* or the tenth book of the *Institutio Oratoria*, how prompt is the shock when we discover how many of the writers whose pages were in the hands of Cicero and Quintilian are wholly lost, or else remain merely as suggestions or memories preserved by the grace of others who wrote about them!

The Middle Age in its earlier centuries had but a shelf or two of pagan Latin books, and misunderstood and exaggerated what it had. Moreover, a great part of their meager knowledge came to them at second hand. In the seventh century, Braulio, bishop of Saragossa, looked on the writings of Isidore of Seville, compiled indiscriminately from a few books, as a restoration of antiquity. No doubt the services of Isidore were priceless. He gathered up the fragments that nothing might be lost. But they were fragments, after all—small, mutilated, battered, and often so unrelated that his work has for us the interest of a collection of débris rather than of a restoration. Yet Braulio could write sincerely, and with some show of truth, that "God had raised him up in these last times to restore the memorials of the ancients, lest we should perish from our rusticity." Later teachers, like Bede and Alcuin, venerated him as their master, and thus extended his influence for ages. How little he, or anyone else, then had to transmit in any way to the future! Less books than fill one big basket would comprise all the pagan Latin writers known

from the seventh to the ninth centuries in western Europe. To Alcuin the library at Fulda seemed to embrace, as he wrote to Rabanus Maurus, "all that the wisdom of the past had conceived," and of the little collection which constituted the library at York, then one of the best in Christendom, he is bold enough to exclaim in verse:

There all the Latin writers make their home
With those that glorious Greece transferred to Rome.

True, indeed; they were probably all there, so far as he knew them. And how few he knew!

Of course, mediæval men could not receive the pagan Latin writers without changing their garb and mien. Under the spell of romance, credulity, or ignorance, the writers of the past began to appear in disguise or metamorphosis. If men might turn into were-wolves, what wonder that Virgil became a wizard and the Latinized Aristotle and Boethius figured as oracles whose utterances were alike axioms and revelations. Catullus, of course, was almost irrecoverably lost. As well might Heine or Burns hope to survive in such an arid waste. Yet in the tenth century we catch a peep at him over the shoulders of Ratherius, bishop of Verona, who admits he was doing a risky thing to read him; and again he appears in the fourteenth century—"heu quantum mutatus ab illo!"—innocently and vaguely described by Nicolaus Trivetus as "Catullus quidam, qui erat vir sapiens et virtuosus!"

Alike in the time of grammar, the earlier part, and in the time of logic, the later part of the Middle Age, Latin literature seems all but nonexistent—forever gone. Little of it is known, and that little so poorly understood as to seem unknown. But at last it appears again in some fulness at the Renaissance. The humanistic enthusiasm continues a long time, and is followed and largely supplanted in these latest times by scientific precision. We have escaped, we say, from the childish mediæval world and from the youthful exuberance of the humanists. In rigorous adherence to scientific method we are determining what ought to be thought about the ancient writers. Being no longer children or youthful enthusiasts, we shall act as befits seasoned manhood; we shall not rest until we penetrate to the real truth which is concealed beneath the deceptive surface of tradition. Away with all that cannot be squared with this rule!

Literary canons, as well as linguistic laws, must be scientific or must be discarded.

It is here, I think, the criticism of Latin literature, as well as of classical antiquity generally, is in some danger of leading to conclusions which are both unserviceable and false. Unserviceable, because attention is diverted from the supremely important fact that the chief value of Latin as well as Greek literature for the modern world does not lie in its quality as material for science, but in its nature as art. As science all our knowledge of the classical literatures, and languages too, cannot compare with any of the greater physical sciences either in universality of range or in promise of discoveries. If this is the be-all and end-all of our efforts, then the study of the antique literature must be and ought to be relegated to a humble place in the hierarchy of learning. But as art, resting of course on scientific determination of what the literature is and means, no science and no other foreign literature may be matched against it. Consequently to exalt the scientific handling of Greek or Latin literature as the end or as a great end of its study, rather than as the laborious self-sacrificing preparation for displaying it as art, is to prevent the manifestation of its real usefulness to the modern world.

Moreover, the apparently rigorous scientific disposition is also leading, I think, to conclusions which are false, or at least unverifiable. Of course, it goes without saying that the debt of classical study, of *Altertumswissenschaft* in general, to scientific method is the debt of its own life. The marvel of the discovery of the laws and of the membering of the parts of the reconstructed record of antiquity by students of the nineteenth century is fully as great, and has, moreover, been attested by proofs as rigorous as the inductions of natural science. It has also been prolific in results beyond its own limits. Let it not be forgotten that comparative philology, as the organon of universal language, is a creation of classical philology. Let it never be forgotten that it was from classical philology, and not from any of the sciences of nature, the impulse came which founded the German *Seminar* in all departments of the higher learning. Endless are the obligations and boundless should be the gratitude of all who care for things intellectual toward those men

who laid the strong scientific foundations on which our best hopes of progress rest.

Let us admit all this, but let us also recognize some other aspects of the question. In the case of Latin literature—to confine ourselves once more to our particular theme—the trouble is not only that its chief value for the modern world is not as science, but also that, even from the standpoint of science, its record is not complete enough to warrant many sweeping conclusions which have been drawn. We may, of course, omit here any account of the clearly conflicting conclusions, most of which eventually refute each other. Leaving them out of view, let us look at another class of inferences. We cannot be sure, in particular, that many of the negative conclusions in the way of distrusting ancient literary judgments are true even when they are consentient, and the reason we cannot trust such negative conclusions is not only the fact that they often rest on an unsympathetic attitude toward the supposed incompetency of Latin writers, as well as on a general *a priori* distrust of tradition, but also the stubborn fact that they are in many cases necessarily based on an insufficient record. It is here attention should be centered. The question is this: After all the piecing and patching done in the way of scientific recovery, to that degree of completeness has the record been restored, and what judgments in the way of literary evaluation may we safely make?

For this purpose the register of what has been lost is not without its importance. It is well worth while to take a fresh look at it, if only in a general way. In so doing let us take into our view everything from the beginnings of pagan Latin down to the year 500 of our era, excluding all Christian Latin and all Greek books written by Romans. The total number of writers regarding whom any notice has been preserved to us is 772, so far as recorded in the pages of Schanz and Teuffel. How many more actually figured in the course of Roman literary history we have no means of knowing, or even of guessing with a fair chance of coming near the truth. There were more, of course, perhaps a great many more, for our list yields an average of only one writer a year from the beginning to the end, and the total is far less than the number of different writers issuing books nowadays in one year either in Germany, France, Great

Britain, or America. Perhaps—yes, almost certainly—these unrecorded writers were in the main the chroniclers, pamphleteers, pedants, scribblers, and nobodies who swarmed about the greater figures. Yet we may think it credible there were hundreds, even thousands, of them, and that their loss has at least deprived us of many aids to understanding the environment in which, or out of which, a good deal of valuable Latin literature emerged.

But take what remains, whether in actual books or in notices about them. Our total number of authors, as already said is 772. From this we must at once subtract 276 writers, not one word of whose writings is known to remain, and 352 others known to us in small fragments of their works. These two classes, wholly or almost wholly lost, comprise four-fifths of the entire list. This fact of facts ought to be learned by heart and to be held in awe by all adventurous generalizers. Still it may be that this enormous proportion of loss is not so regrettable as it seems. The rhetoricians, annalists, lawyers, and grammarians are there in abundance, and seem to verify Lord Bacon's opinion that in the course of history the heavier things go to the bottom—the works of erudition sink. Yet there are other losses of a different sort. If we can easily spare the scribblers in verse, such as Aquinus, Cæsius, and Suffenus, “quem probe nosti,” known because they are pilloried to our gaze in the poems of Catullus, it is not quite so easy to part with so many of the literary friends of Horace—

animæ quales neque candiores
terra tulit.

Virgil, the best of all, the “half of his soul,” fortunately remains, and so we may console ourselves. But there is little of what Augustus wrote, unless we have the hardihood to count the *Monumentum Ancyranum* as literature and to believe it his own composition. The rest has perished, except six lines of his epigrams, some slight parts of his speeches, and a few traces of the thirteen books of his autobiography. Of his poems, his letters, his memoir of Drusus, and other compositions we have nothing. Mæcenæ fares even worse. He wrote much; yet twenty lines of his verse and a few other stray quotations are all we have. Asinius Pollio fares a little better. Three of his letters remain. But his extensive *History of the Civil*

Wars in seventeen books is scarcely more than a memory. His account of the battles of Thapsus and Pharsalus, and of the death of Cato and Cicero, would surely be interesting reading. Varius, commended by Horace for his epic verse; Valgius Rufus, the writer of elegies; Aristius Fuscus, unforgettable so long as *Integer Vitae* shall be sung; Viscus and Fundanius, are known to us, not by their writings, but because Horace knew them.

How the losses extend in every direction! Turn again to the historians and look at the devastation wrought in their accounts of the Civil Wars. More than the book of Asinius Pollio has disappeared. Sulla's twenty-two books of *Commentaries*, full of Roman *superbia*, Sisenna's account, and the five books of Sallust's *Histories*, all documents of the first order, are lost. Follow the line of lost histories still farther. How much better would be our understanding of Tacitus if we had Pliny's *History of the German Wars*, and how lonely an adventure it is to traverse the labyrinthine windings of that portion of later imperial history where we have no guide save the sober but inexperienced Ammianus Marcellinus!

Take a closer look at Sallust. What are we to make of the conflict of opinion regarding his literary and historical merits? Antiquity held in the main to one view. Modern critics lean to another. The famous sentence of Quintilian, comparing Sallust to Thucydides, has been a shining mark for aspersion. The express testimony of Martial (XIV, 191) that the Roman critics rated Sallust as the first Roman historian is given little weight. The fact that Tacitus, greatest of all their writers of history, styles him "*rerum Romanarum florentissimus auctor*",¹ and that Augustine cites him as "*nobilitatae veritatis historicus*,"² seems not so very important. Were they mistaken? Are we to make great allowances for their rhetoric and consider their statements unintelligent compliments? Are we to acquiesce in such a statement as the following, in a respectable history of Roman literature? "Of his [Sallust's] *Histories* we have but a few fragments, mostly speeches, of which the style seems a little fuller than usual; our judgment of the writer must be based upon the two essays that have reached us entire." And again: "His style is peculiar. He himself evidently imitated,

¹ *Ann.*, III, 30.

² *De Civitate Dei*, I, 9.

and was thought by Quintilian to rival, Thucydides. But the resemblance is in language only,"¹ *Itane vero?* We are then to form our opinion solely on the *Catiline* and *Jugurtha*, and Quintilian's opinion that Sallust rivaled Thucydides is to be allowed only so far as it relates to resemblance in language. Did this writer seriously weigh what Quintilian said and what he meant? Did he remember that what Quintilian is talking about is histories most useful for an orator to know, and that to assume he meant more is to assume a good deal? But whether the question is one of the style or of more than the style, the point to remember is that Quintilian's opinion was based on the whole of Sallust, and therefore had reference not so much to the *Catiline* and *Jugurtha*, two short essays, as to Sallust's masterwork, the lost *Histories*. Why, then, are we to discredit his opinion without at least knowing the lost book? And why should anyone talk of basing any opinion on Sallust as a whole without taking his greatest work into some account? Why, again, are we to suppose that the estimate of such an ancient critic as Quintilian, based on a knowledge of the whole, is antecedently less trustworthy than a modern estimate based on the smaller and less valuable part of that whole?

But suppose the opinion of Quintilian does involve more than the question of style, and means that he thought Sallust was the first of Roman historians and was fit to be compared with Thucydides. It sounds audacious enough, but how do we *know*—not feel sure—there was not substantial truth in it? If he means that Sallust is the Roman Thucydides, just as Livy is in his view the analogue to Herodotus, we are not then compelled to believe Quintilian meant that Sallust was absolutely as great in every way as his Greek prototype, but merely that he was worthy to be compared with him. What do we need most in order to revise, discard, or confirm Quintilian's judgment? The lost book of Sallust. With this in our hands, we might hold as advantageous position for observation as Quintilian held.

Let us consider, however, some of the things that may help us to respect his judgment, even if we cannot settle its precise value. Fortunately, we have some fragments of the *Histories*, enough at

¹ Cruttwell, *History of Roman Literature*, pp. 203, 204.

least to warrant the belief that, if they are representative, they show a marked superiority both in thought and style over Sallust's earlier works. They have less artificiality and greater maturity, penetration, and elevation. I do not see how anyone can fail to be impressed by this instantly when he reads the extracts imbedded in Augustine's discussion of Roman history in the earlier part of the *City of God*.¹ Consider also that down to the end of the Empire Sallust figured not only as a writer of brilliant style, but that his well-earned reputation for truthfulness—not the truthfulness that depends on mechanical accuracy, but the inner truthfulness of insight into characters and causes—made him the first authority on the times of which he wrote and the textbook for Roman schools. When Augustine wants a witness pagan Romans will accept, he cites Sallust. "Ipsium Sallustium potius adhibebo," he confidently writes, and then begins quoting the *Histories*.² And a little later, as he gives them glimpses at the dark pictures of Roman degeneracy in Sallust's *Histories*, he adds:

Nor should good and wise Romans be angry at us because we thus speak; and since, however, it is most certain they will not be angry in the least, there is of course no need for any such warning. For we are saying nothing severer than their own authors, to whom we are wholly unequal in ease of style, authors they have toiled to learn and compel their own sons to study. And if any do become angry, how could they endure me, if I were to say the things Sallust has said?³

And what of the relation of Tacitus to Sallust? Does it not help our confidence in Quintilian? A century and a half had passed since Sallust wrote. Time enough had elapsed for his books to live down the sour remarks of Asinius Pollio about his fondness for old-fashioned words plundered from the vocabulary of Cato, and other dispraise of like nature. The judgment of cultivated men—"doctorum corda virorum," as Martial puts it (XIV, 191)—swung decisively in his favor as the greatest of their historians up to that time. Tacitus, who found in Cicero his earliest model, soon found and acknowledged in Sallust the spirit most in accord with his own mood and the writer most worthy to develop his maturing style until he should attain one almost wholly his own. The parallel in the progress of the two is

¹ *De Civitate Dei*, I, 74, 75, 79, 119, 121, 122, 132. Dombart's edition.

² *Ibid.*, I, 74.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 122.

most striking in thought as well as in style. The stage of advancement shown in his *Agricola* and *Germania* answers to Sallust's *Catiline* and *Jugurtha*, and both writers reach full maturity in their *Histories*.¹ How much this helps us toward the belief that Quintilian, in praising Sallust as the Roman mate to Thucydides, did not fail to take into account Sallust's greatest, most characteristic, and most truly historical work, and that the loss of this book helps to explain the inability of modern critics to see things in the main as Quintilian saw them. How easily the relation of Tacitus to Sallust also helps us to believe that Quintilian's estimate, while far too complimentary, if pressed to an extreme interpretation, is nevertheless a sound one in the sense he intended it.

Four-fifths of our writers, as already remarked, have disappeared. What of the remaining fifth—the one hundred and forty-four survivors? Sixty-four of these have lost the majority of their books on the way. Ennius, Cato, Varro, Sallust, Livy, Petronius, Suetonius, Hadrian, and perhaps Julius Cæsar and the elder Pliny, are among them. Forty-three remain with the greater part of their writings, as Cicero, Catullus, Nepos, Virgil, Propertius, Ovid, Quintilian, Martial, Tacitus, Gellius, Ausonius. Only thirty-seven come with practically or absolutely all their books—among them, Terence, Lucretius, Tibullus, Juvenal, Claudian, and, to our delight, Horace. How significant it is that these last two groups include nearly all the best poets. They, at least, are ours. Their boasts about surviving the flight of time have been made good. Perhaps they may outlast the pyramids too.

Some of the best remains, but four-fifths of our writers, and apparently more than four-fifths of their writings, are beyond our reach. This is an ever-present cause which will silently operate to produce conflicting judgments so long as men are willing to generalize on the basis of an insufficient record. What, then, will help toward a clearer, a really more stable, agreement? First of all, I think, the willingness to stay ignorant when knowledge is unattainable, and the consequent readiness to identify and avoid the regions where exploration is not at present possible. Another help is the disposition to

¹ Teuffel, 335, 2.

recognize that some traditional views may be true, even when we cannot verify them; or, at any rate, to recognize that the mere fact a view is traditional is not in itself a highly suspicious circumstance; and, lastly, that to justify a suspected tradition is at least as great a triumph of criticism as to suspect a justified tradition.